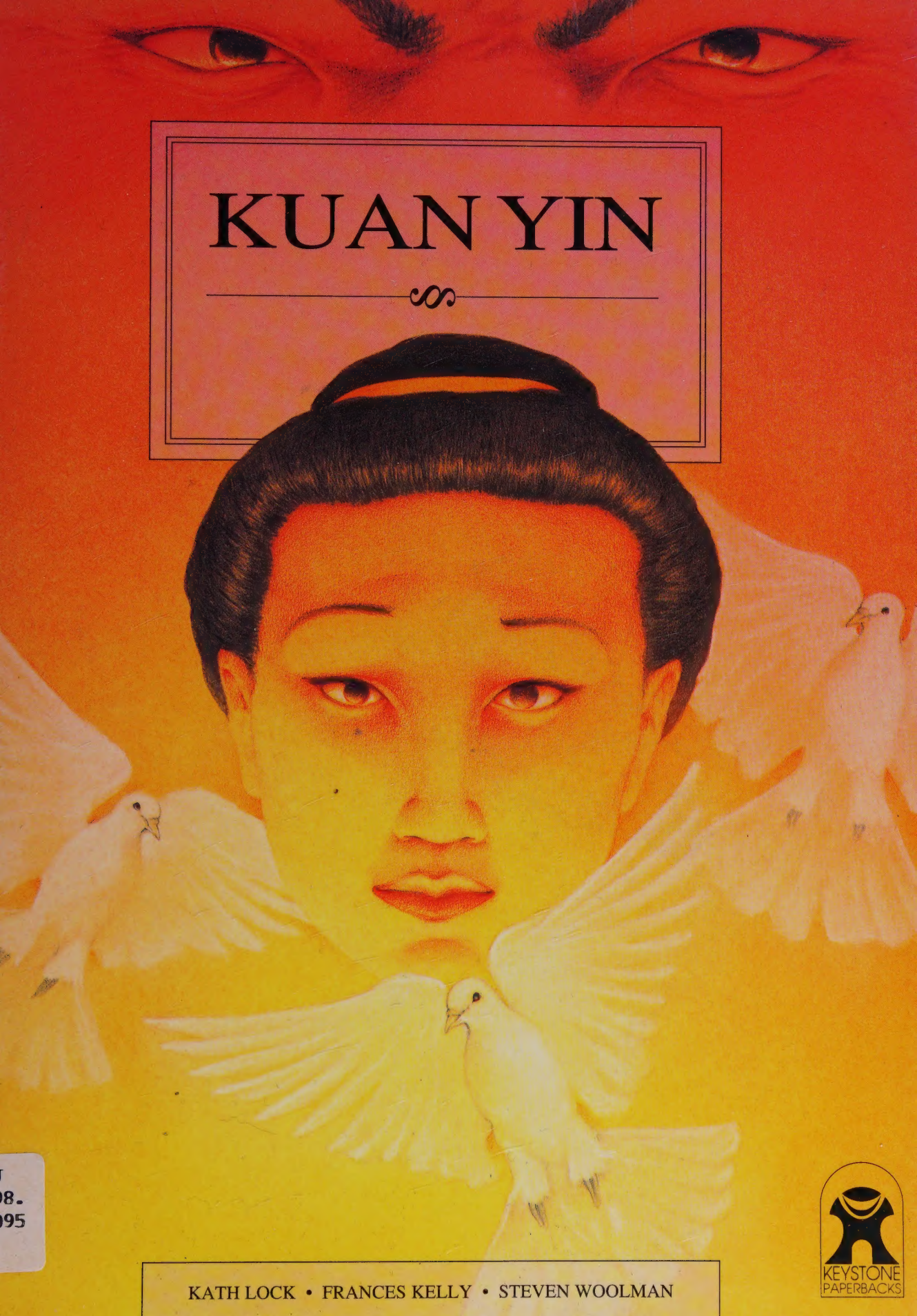
KUAN YIN



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KEYSTONE
PAPERBACKS

KUAN YIN

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For Beth (K.L.)
For my daughters, Gabrielle and Justine (F.K.)

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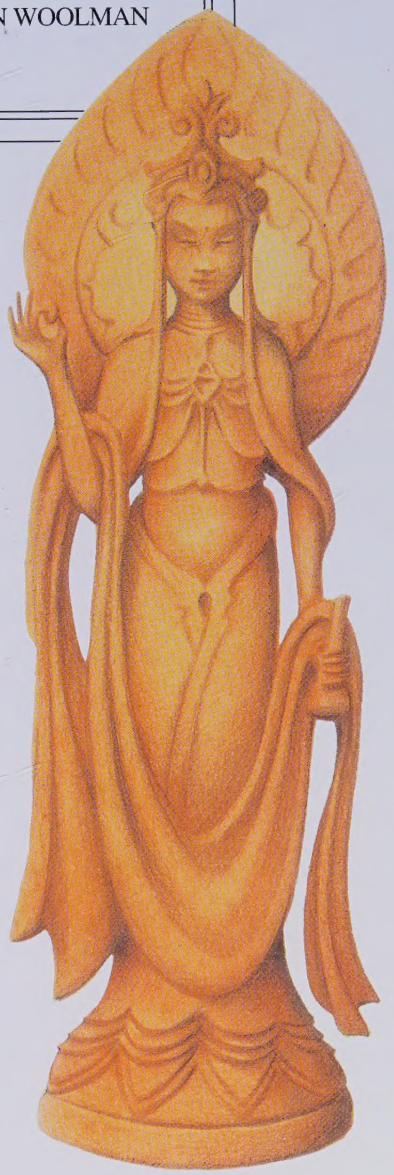

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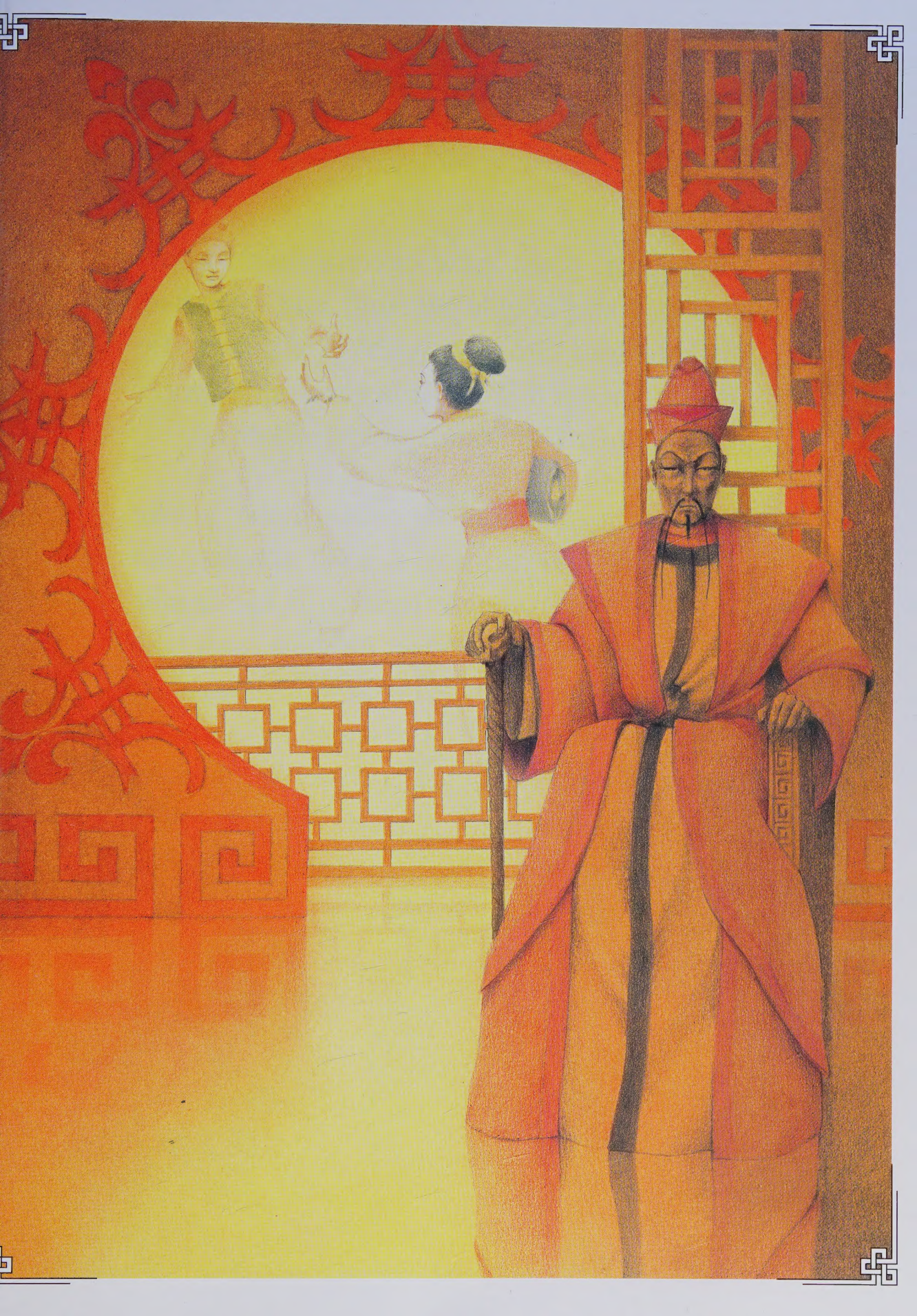
KEYSTONE PICTURE BOOKS

The Chinese Buddhist tradition includes the goddess of compassion, Kuan Yin. In other cultures she is known as Guanyin, Kuan-Shi Yin Tzu Tsai and Kuan Yin P'u-sa. In this story Kuan Yin saves a beautiful young woman from becoming the Fifth Wife of an aging Chinese lord.

There was once a poor scholar's daughter who, according to the custom of the time in ancient China, had long been promised as the Fifth Wife to an aging lord. But less than one hour before she was to go to the lord's home she disappeared.

It was said she had run away with a penniless young suitor to the slopes of Nan Yeo, and that they planned to live in a disused shrine at the foot of the mountain.



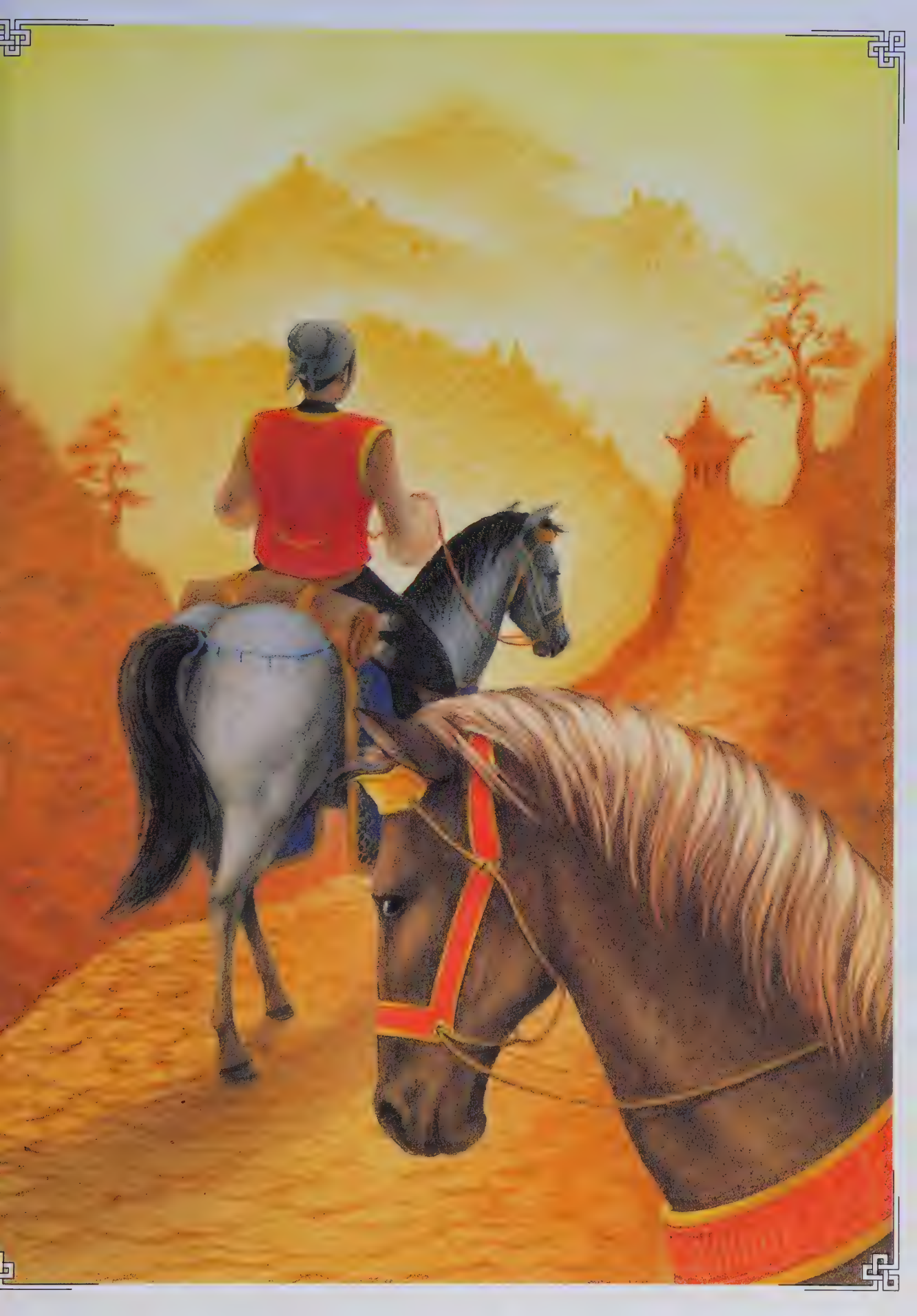
Some lords, given these circumstances, would have had the couple arrested and punished, but this lord did not wish to do that. He made it known that if she behaved in a proper manner, then she could return unharmed.

He sent his nephew to retrieve the young bride. The nephew was a good scholar, but he had not yet brought honour to his family. Both the uncle and the nephew saw the retrieval of the Fifth Wife as an opportunity to gain this honour. The nephew secretly sympathised with the Fifth Wife, but he agreed to his uncle's request. He knew that if he refused this task, then dishonour would be absolute.

"When you find them at the foot of the sacred mountain," said the aging Lord, "you shall offer the suitor this money. It will be his on the day he leaves for a far off province. If he goes quickly and quietly, I will see he secures good employment wherever he chooses to go. But if he is unwilling, then you should quickly despatch him to the land of the ghosts. Make haste. Bring my bride to me without delay."

The nephew took with him a purse of money for the young man, maps and a pair of fine horses. It took him several days to travel to Mount Nan Yeo for the road was difficult. When he arrived at the foot of the great mountain it was evening, and he was tired and hungry. He could see temples in the distance, dotting the slopes of the mountain.

Although he knew he was near to the disused shrine where his uncle's bride and her companion were believed to be living, the young scholar thought it best to sleep and to be refreshed when he approached. So he decided to spend the night in a small temple of Kuan Yin, the goddess of compassion.

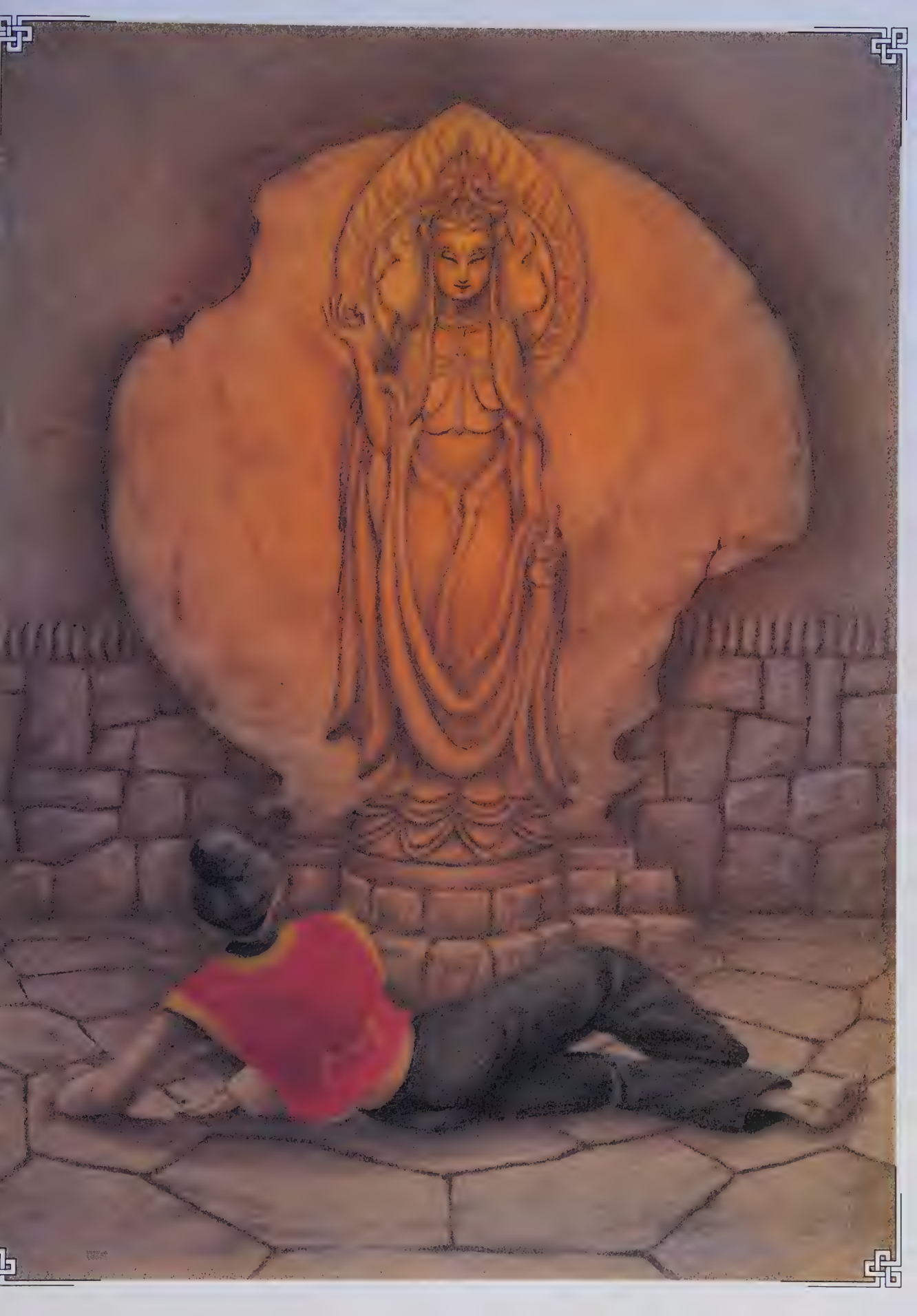


He slept well, but woke suddenly, troubled by a dream. In the dream, a broken statue of Kuan Yin had spoken to him. It was as though it had really happened and he remembered distinctly every word that had been said.

"I have forever dedicated myself to the easing of all suffering and you are the one I have chosen to help me. You must listen and obey."

The dream was so real that the young scholar thought he could smell the fragrance of the goddess as her robe brushed past him.

"It must be that my conscience is troubling me on account of that poor girl," he said to himself. But the honour of his family was of more importance, so he continued his journey.



In no time at all he reached an abandoned shrine, and there, seated near the door, was a simply dressed, very beautiful young woman, but he could see no sign of her companion.

He spoke gently to her. "Oh beautiful Fifth Wife, I am your worthless nephew by marriage. I have come to take you home to my uncle for your wedding. He is ready to welcome you as though you had never been away. Preparations are made for your wedding feast and my uncle awaits. You should come quietly, if your suitor is to remain safe."

"But I have no suitor. I am with the holy nuns who live in the convent on the highest part of the mountain. They have caused you no harm. It is my wish to live in the convent, but I will stay here until your uncle's wrath is over, for I want no harm to come to them. I will not return to him. I would sooner die."

The young scholar took no notice of her words. Lifting the young woman onto the second horse, he tied her securely with silken cords, which were hidden by the folds of her garments. No one who passed them on their journey would know that she was his captive.

"What you do will bring much evil into your life and will touch many lives to come," whispered the young woman.

"Whatever the cost, I must perform this duty," he replied. "The honour of my entire family depends upon it." And he mounted his horse.

Soon they reached the small temple where the nephew had spent the previous night. The young woman begged to be allowed to stop at the shrine so she could pray to Kuan Yin. The nephew could not refuse, but, as he tethered the horses, the Fifth Wife slipped quickly and quietly into the temple. He immediately ran after her and was confronted by the strangest sight.

The broken statue of Kuan Yin had taken on the form of the beautiful Fifth Wife, circled by glowing light. Beside her stood two shining spirits.

The young scholar was astonished and more than a little frightened.

The goddess spoke to him. "I, Kuan Yin, am here to save you from a terrible mistake, one that would be a burden to you and your family for many lives to come. You must take me back to the shrine where you found me. You must then go on to the monastery, take your vows and live there until this life of yours is past. You must not return to your uncle's territories where there is so much greed and unhappiness."

So saying, the image once more became that of the broken statue of Kuan Yin, and the young woman stood near the scholar. This time he knew he would follow his conscience. He would return her to the convent, then continue on to the monastery to take his vows.

Meanwhile, the aging lord, fearing for the safety of his nephew and his Fifth Wife, journeyed with a troop of soldiers in search of them. He heard that his bride had been returned to the convent and his nephew had entered a monastery. Angered by the loss of his nephew, he ordered his soldiers to follow him so that the Fifth Wife could be destroyed once and for all.

When they reached the convent, the soldiers sent blazing arrows onto the roof and soon a fire began to rage, consuming all in its path.

So great was the uncle's wrath that he fell down dead. His army watched in wonder as a beautiful white bird flew from the remains of the convent. It circled three times before vanishing into the distant gates of Kuan Yin Pure Land.

The Fifth Wife, through the strength of Kuan Yin, had finally triumphed over the aging lord, and was released from the cares of life.

292
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KUAN YIN

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Kuan Yin, goddess of compassion, helps the beautiful fifth wife escape marriage to an old and evil lord. This story is from ancient China where Kuan Yin is revered today.

KEYSTONE PAPERBACKS

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